



Angel Catbird, Vol. 1

Margaret Atwood , Johnnie Christmas (Artist) , Tamra Bonvillian (Color Artist)

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Lauded novelist Margaret Atwood and acclaimed artist Johnnie Christmas collaborate on one of the most highly anticipated comic book and literary events of the year!

On a dark night, young genetic engineer Strig Feleedus is accidentally mutated by his own experiment and merges with the DNA of a cat and an owl. What follows is a humorous, action-driven, pulp-inspired superhero adventure-- with a lot of cat puns.

Published in over thirty-five countries, Margaret Atwood is one of the most important living writers of our day and is the author of more than forty books of fiction, poetry, and critical essays. Her work has won the Man Booker Prize, the Giller Prize, Premio Mondello, and more. *Angel Catbird* is her first graphic novel series.

Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* was named one of Time magazine's 100 best English-language novels published since 1923 and her recent *MaddAddam Trilogy* is currently being adapted into an HBO television show by Darren Aronofsky

Angel Catbird, Vol. 1 Details

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From Reader Review Angel Catbird, Vol. 1 for online ebook

Renata says

I know, I know! I made this pledge to read at least fifty percent non-fiction books this year so what am I doing reading a comic book with such a goofy title: Angel Catbird???

Let me just say, sometimes we find books, as in recommendations from friends or reviews, and sometimes a marvelous serendipity sends books to find us as in the right book for whatever mood we are in.

Angel Catbird is a comic book by one of my favorite authors that found me when I needed some levity in my life.

A few weeks back an interview with Margaret Atwood attracted my attention because it was on such an unexpected topic - her love of cartooning as a child and her creation of a comic book with cat character.

Already I was laughing? Really???

Not only do I share a Canadian background with Atwood but I, too, was an avid reader of comic books as a kid. In fact one of my memorable traumas was losing my entire comic book collection as a new teenager when my dad's car was demolished in an accident the week after we moved to California. Still shedding tears! So the fact that Atwood could revive her childhood pleasures drawing cat cartoons and creating a few Marvel style heroes was worth a look.

Soooo - what was the book like? Super playful, a bit silly, full of cat puns, and channeling Atwood's guilty awareness of the fragile cat/bird balance in nature: "From this collision between my comic-reading-and-writing self and the bird blood on my hands, Angel Catbird was born. I pondered him for several years, and even did some preliminary sketches. He would be a combination of cat, owl, and human being, and he would thus have an identity conflict - do I save this baby robin or do I eat it? But he would be able to understand both sides of the question. He would be a walking, talking, flying carnivore's dilemma." (From her biographical forward)

Who are the characters? Stig Feleedus, like Spider-Man, falls victim to science run awry and turns into an owl-cat being. There are some pretty hilarious scenes here. The femme-fatale is Cate Leon a half cat whose fancy go-go dancer outfit for the Catastrophe nightclub was designed by Atwood, a Count Catula - part

Jenbebookish says

This is really sad because Margaret Atwood is a love of mine, and I adore her beyond belief, and I wanted this to be good. But it really, really isn't. MAYBE, MAYBE if you really love cats, you might be able to throw another star on top of my two stars, for the little RSPCA tidbits every couple pages, but I found them to be totally ridiculous. They just interrupted the flow of an already painful reading experience, and basically turned this into a pamphlet for cats rather than a graphic novel. The art was pretty terrible, and so was the story line and dialogue.. this was literally like reading a comic made for a child. There were a few brief moments of things that might be for adult audiences, but most of the time this was like reading a really cheesy children's comic. Two stars is being generous but I added that second star just because I liked the Rat villain. He was artistically the best part about the whole thing, not his character specifically or what it brought to the story line but rather just his aesthetics. He was so ugly and ratty, which was of course the point;)

I already bought the 2 volume so I'll prob end up reading it but if it wasn't already purchased, I wouldn't bother.

Wealththeow says

A scientist invents a formula that accidentally turns him into a half-cat, half-bird superhero. His boss repeatedly tries to steal the formula in hopes of turning his army of rats into half-humans that can take over the world.

This was really, really bad. Incredibly clunky dialog, characters as flat as cardboard, very simplistic plot and action, the ONLY female character exists purely to spout exposition and get saved from danger. Instead of nuanced characters or humor, everything is a cheap cat-related pun. Here's a scene from a night club that caters to half-cats, with characters named things like Babushkat, Cat O' Nine Tales, Octopuss, and Count Catula.

Why did every one of them dress in some sort of themed costume that matches their crappy pun-name? Why did that one mummy cat character bring her kids to a night club? Why is the love interest wearing a fur bikini?

The whole comic is incredibly disappointing. There's no imagination, no invention, nothing thoughtful. It's frankly insulting that it got published in this form.

Maya says

Wow, for a debut work this one sure is fantastic made. And what is even more awesome we get to see parts of how the story came to live and the idea behind it. I have to say the sketches and posters at the end of the story are just amazingly well done! I love the detail in each of them and I think that really made me like the story even more. All the different characters, each one of them super unique and fun, just a charry on the cake! Also the plot is interesting, fresh and besides the action and mystery we also get a hint of romance. I only wished we'd got more of the story, but the second volume is coming out in February, so I guess we'll just have to wait for that one to come to see how the story continues.

All in all, I loved the artwork, plot and even the rat guy (imagine that!). Just a fun quick read! Definitely recommend! :)

Tatiana says

Was this meant to be so ridiculously bad?

Bridget Mckinney says

Listen, I will read literally anything with Margaret Atwood's name on it, so I fully expect to keep on with this series. However, *Angel Catbird* is a profoundly silly book (so many groanworthy puns) that is very straightforward about functioning more as a PSA than as any kind of actually good story.

Margaret Atwood, being a cat lover, wants people to keep their cats indoors. Margaret Atwood, also being a lover of comic books and old enough and well-respected enough that she can do whatever she wants, also wanted to tick "Write a comic book" off her bucket list. *Angel Catbird* is undoubtedly a comic book, and it's even full of helpful statistics and factoids that support the case of keeping cats indoor-only, so in those ways it's essentially a success.

If you like cats, don't mind statistical asides in your comics, and/or just adore everything about Margaret Atwood, you'll probably enjoy this book. If you're looking for the kind of literary greatness one might ordinarily expect from Atwood, I suggest waiting a few more weeks for *Hag-Seed* instead.

Read more reviews at SF Bluestocking.

Leonard Gaya says

"Why such a nice old lady messing around with flying cat-owl superheroes and nightclubs for cat people, not to mention giant rat men? Strange". Margaret Atwood did predict that a comic book project such as this one, coming from an author such as her, would make a few readers raise their eyebrows. What she probably did not perceive is that it's not so much the nature of the project as the quality of the final result which is surprising.

Atwood (according to what she says in the introduction to this volume) has been a comic books' fan since after WWII, and incidentally a cats' fan too; so this, it seems, was a book project close to her heart. Unfortunately, the story is so formulaic, the dialogues so dull, the artwork so ugly (not to mention the RSPCA-like blurb that interrupts the reading every couple of pages), that I will probably leave this series at that.

Finally, Atwood certainly knows that her story about cats and mice persecuting each other would bring Spiegelman's *Maus* to mind. Why write a story that, with this massive reference in the background, could be interpreted in the wrong way? Strange.

David Schaafsma says

One of our greatest living novelists writes a story for a graphic novel when she is 77. Which doesn't mean everything she writes is great, of course, but when she does write a comic, you get curious. In an introduction, she reveals she grew up reading comics, a move she makes to approach credibility, but this doesn't still make her a decent contemporary comics reader or writer. She also is a bird advocate. So she creates basically this psa for preserving birds, suggesting cats stay indoors, with a pretty lamely written story and little factoid panels about birds and cats scattered irritatingly throughout.

Dark Horse hired Johnny Christmas to do the drawing, with Tamra Bonvillain as colorist, but the work is just okay. And the writing, oy: Lots of lame puns. It is somewhat pulp-inspired, given what Atwood read when growing up in the late forties and fifties. And maybe intended for YA readers because of the escapism on the one hand and the animal didacticism on the other hand. But nah. Not well-written, not a very good comic.

Chris says

I enjoyed this. I found the bit about educating the reader about cats to be a bit over the top, to be honest. Yet, the artwork and story were fun.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I was super excited by the idea of this graphic novel, of reading one of my favorite authors in a new genre, etc. I don't want to sour the broth but I was left pretty unsatisfied.

If you read this as "aging author writes something fun because she's the queen and who will stop her," then I suppose it does what it is setting out to do. It shows in the silliness of the subject matter and in the seemingly strange PSA type infospots on cat health throughout the pages.

As a graphic novel, the art is well done; I enjoyed the commentary on the designs and coloring at the end of the review copy. It was fun to see where Margaret Atwood got involved in the costume design and visualizing the characters.

It is surprising to me that it is the story itself that I find issue. The good vs. evil is so simplistic I can't see how it will even play out in further volumes. There were zero surprises and few depths of characters or back stories. Not what I'd usually expect from her, and not even what I'd expect from a graphic novel. Not in a universe where we have complex worlds like in the Sandman, fresh new characters like Ms. Marvel, and new ideas like in Saga.

And then I was disappointed that I was so disappointed. I worry I missed something, maybe that the entire project is tongue-in-cheek. I think that was a fine place to start but I would have worked harder on story.

Thanks to the publisher for providing me early access through Edelweiss.

Cat (cat-thecatladylady) says

this is so weird but I kinda liked it? once you accept its strangeness, it's very fun. it has the same or even more puns (cat related, I might add) than any Arnold Schwarzenegger movie. the story isn't that innovative but it's definitely something I wouldn't mind picking up again. also, amazing art because making good human/animal hybrids is hard af.

full review here: <https://catshelf.wordpress.com/2016/0...>

Erica says

Atwood says in her introduction that she grew up on old comics, both in magazine form and in the papers. It shows.

This is corny, written like a throwback but without any nuance that shows the author understands readers don't read comics in the same way anymore, that they're not quick pictorial stories for children, they're full-on novels for all ages. As such, this one does not hit the mark, not by a longshot.

In this particular installment, nerdy dude Stig Feleedus was headhunted by a mad scientist-ish person, Dr. A. Muroid, who wants him to work on a top secret project, a serum that splices genes, ostensibly to cure diseases but, as we see just a few panels later, it's really to turn a bunch of female rats into a harem of hot rat women. Turns out, Stig's predecessor, a guy who was worried someone would steal his work and use it to bad ends, was MURDERED, and Stig's here to piece the work back together. This information comes via new co-worker Cate Leone (yes, you read that right) As Stig works all night to figure out the missing component in the top secret project (Spoiler: it's baking soda. That's what the murdered predecessor left out of the formula so that no one could use it to make harems of rat women) he is able to whip up the formula just as Dr. Muroid, boss and maniac, calls to ask for a progress report and demands Stig come into the office immediately upon finding out about Stig's success. But oh no! As Stig runs from the house with a beaker of blue serum in his hand, his housecat, Ding (yes, short for Schrödinger) runs out of the house to chase a rat that just appeared. Stig chases his beloved pet who is now also the target of an owl (maybe the mysterious rat is the owl's intended prey, there's really no telling) and all three - man, cat, and owl - are hit by an oncoming car in the residential street. And that's why we always obey the speed limit. But lo and behold! The serum falls from Stig's hand, the beaker breaks and the blue formula puddles around the bodies. The car drives off and we see that the obviously-evil Dr. Muroid inside, cackling over how his trained robo-rat was really worth the time and effort he put in to making it. Furthermore, he's happy that Stig is out of the picture and the only batch of serum has been ruined. Now he plans to go to the office and take the serum recipe from Stig's work computer...only...um...Stig made the serum at home and I don't think he uploaded the recipe to the work computer so Muroid is in the same position he was in before hiring Stig to discover baking soda. But whatever. The point here is that Stig wakes up, grows wings and bird-of-prey talons along with a cat face and tail. It's like the owl and the pussycat went to sea and then had a terrible accident and became a nerdy guy who can fly and wants to eat rats.

Stig isn't aware of what happened because he slammed into a brick wall and woke up as a human so figured it was all a dream. Off to work he goes the next day only to realize that Cate Leone is super hot and that his boss is a rat. Literally. He and Cate have lunch and she explains that she's a half-cat person and she can tell he is, too, only she also smells feathers on him and then she says that the boss is half-rat and to be careful and then there's a cat nightclub where Cate is kind of a boss and she wears a barbarian bikini and rats try to take over the city and Angel Catbird gets his name and OMG what IS this shit?

Bad. Bad is what it is.

Sam Quixote says

Quite a few genre novelists have turned their hands to comics in the past - Greg Rucka, Brad Meltzer, Gregg Hurwitz and Caitlin Kittredge to name a few - some of them successfully too, but there's been a weird trend recently of literary writers having a go at comics as well. Chuck Palahniuk's much anticipated sequel, *Fight Club 2*, and Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Black Panther* for Marvel are two high profile examples from the last year with Margaret Atwood's *Angel Catbird* being the latest. And, like Palahniuk and Coates' efforts, Atwood's is complete rubbish!

Let's look at her intro: she emphasises in the first paragraph that she's "an award-winning nice literary old lady" - and already there's a sense of sneering condescension. She's an award-winning literary writer - so

what the heck's she doing slumming it in the retarded comics world?!? She then name-checks a bunch of famous comics (she knows how to use Google!) before mentioning that "Spider-Man, who begat Wolverine" when it came to "psychologically complex characters with relationship problems". Uh, what? How did Spidey beget Wolverine in any sense?

Anyway, after Atwood's failed attempt at pretending to seem like she knows superhero comics, we're onto the comic proper and from the first page she had me reeling in disbelief. Is this really the final version of the comic?! Dated thought balloons and clunky exposition wherein the protagonist tells us he was headhunted for a top secret project. Oof.

Then we're in some supposedly modern lab where our protagonist, Strig Feleedus (worst character name of 2016), has a lone beaker on his desk next to his computer - to show us he's a scientist! I wonder if he was a banker he'd have a piggy bank on his desk or some scales if he was a lawyer!

This is followed by more awkward talking from some random character who calls the boss "The Big Cheese" and that "He needs to be the smartest guy in the room. Even when he's not." Such natural-sounding conversation between two strangers meeting for the first time!

The bad guy - and you know he's the villain because he's fat, ugly and in charge - is Dr Muroid, the name itself screaming evil. Dialogue is once again Atwood's enemy as she struggles and fails to come up with even remotely convincing-sounding speech between two supposed scientists. Muroid talks vaguely about "the special project" and "results", Strig talks about a missing piece of "the original code". More clichés follow about being "top in the field" and then, once Strig's out of earshot, Muroid's talking to his rats and thought-bubble-thinking Strig's an idiot. Everyone understood that he's the bad guy yet!?!?

I could go through every one of the 71 pages in this book and show how Atwood, despite claiming to have made comics for years in her intro, has only the most rudimentary understanding of comics storytelling. And, though I've only read *The Handmaid's Tale* and hated it, I don't remember her prose being this bad before. I'm going to assume she's deliberately emulating the simplistic writing of the Golden Age comics she grew up reading as a kid.

Not that that makes the book any better to read. The story is full of superhero clichés - the scientist whose experiment inadvertently gives him superpowers, the obvious love interest and clumsily-introduced romantic angle, the villain's plot to take over the world - but I guess this is Atwood's attempt at homage? Because I don't know why else - at age 77 - she would write a comic that's mocking the genre it used to be decades ago and she claims to have loved.

Johnnie Christmas' art is ok but he basically lifts Juanjo Guarnido's character designs from *Blacksad* (also published by Dark Horse) which features anthropomorphic animals, particularly cats. And what's going on with the human-cats' clothes when they transform from quasi-humans into cats - the way he draws them makes them look like the clothes are organically part of the creatures?!

Oh and the puns - is that Atwood's "humour"? Is that what splits the sides of "award-winning literary" writers? How about a pie in the face gag while you're at it? Also let's randomly toss in some tedious footnote facts about cats every once in a while even though they add nothing to the book?!

I wonder if Margaret Atwood has honestly read any comics past 1970. She'd know then that there are ways to pay homage to the past while also telling a contemporary story that doesn't talk down to the reader or bore them horribly. These literary writer dilettantes need to realise comics readers aren't complete idiots and have

to stop trying to pass off these half-assed scripts as if such shoddy, lazy efforts are acceptable; as if comics readers don't need anything more than the bare minimum to be engaged unlike their sophisticated novel-reading audience where real effort must be made. All books like this show is the lack of respect and sheer contempt they have for the genre and their dearth of understanding in writing for its readership.

Corny plot, one-dimensional characters, horrendous dialogue, and an uninspired, derivative story from first page to last, Atwood makes the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles look like the pinnacle of comics art with her Angel Catbird garbage. I got nothing out of this drivel, it was just bad all the way through. No clue who would find this entertaining - pompous "literary old ladies", sorry pompous "award-winning literary old ladies" only probably. Check out the aforementioned Blacksad to read a good comic - one where the writer actually cares about what they're writing and tries to make reading it enjoyable for their audience - featuring talking cats instead of this shite.

Stewart Tame says

This feels a bit over simplified. Strig Feleedus (yeah, if you hate punning names, you're really not going to like this book) is a genetics engineer who gets into an accident with an experimental formula that basically gives him the combined powers of a cat and an owl. This draws him into a fight between cat people and rat people, and the story will be continued in the next volume.

Unfortunately, Atwood makes the same mistake that many "real" writers make in transitioning to comics by assuming that a more simple, unsophisticated tone is necessary, of dumbing things down. "It's just comics," seems to be the unspoken assumption behind much of this project. While it's possible that this was written with an eye toward a younger audience, I doubt they would enjoy being talked down to any more than I do.

I don't mean to imply that this is a complete disaster. There are some fun concepts and characters here. The artwork is lovely; Johnny Christmas is one to watch. Atwood's writing is strongest on the little details of applying catlike ways of thinking to humans, Strig's dilemma about saving a baby bird or eating it for instance. There's just an overall lack of polish and deliberate crudeness in the way the story is constructed and told that grates on me. It feels like Atwood is slumming, thinking she doesn't have to do her best because, "It's just comics."

I also don't care for all the cat factoids that pop up on the bottom of random pages. I get that they're well intentioned, but they interrupt the flow of the story, and would probably have been better off on a page or two by themselves toward the end of the book.

The book is rounded out--almost doubled in length, really--by character sketches, pinups, coloring process demonstrations, and the like. All in all, it's not bad. Kind of fun, even. Just don't go in expecting much.

El says

Oh, Margaret.

Let me just say right off the bat that I will read whatever volumes of Angel Catbird hit the shelves because I am a Margaret Atwood junky.

But I will not pretend like this graphic novel is a *good* one.

It has some okay features. Honestly, I was really into the artwork. I liked the *concept*, wherein this character turns into this great hybrid human-cat-bird-thing. I hope there will be more internal struggle over the cat-bird dichotomy because that could be really interesting.

But the dialogue is painful, cringe-worthy at times. The puns are *bad*, and believe me - I love a good bad pun. Normally. But it doesn't work here.

Well, that's not entirely true. If I was a teenager, I probably would love this. I feel this is geared towards younger readers which is not always a guarantee with graphic novels. I know many readers who look down on graphic novels or comic books for being juvenile or whatever, but I will continue to read the shit out of Thor comics as long as I breathe, and like Michael Chabon and Ayelet Waldman once said at a joint lecture series, reading comics/graphic novels is still *reading*. They don't tell their kids who has a comic book in their hands to put it down and pick up a "real book". I liked that. If I had kids, I hope I would be that way. (But I don't, so moot.)

There is not a lot of transition here between scenes. There's a lot of action, it's very action-driven. There's a villain, but it's almost a too much of a caricature to really appreciate or care much about, which again goes back to the whole thing that I believe this may have initially been aimed towards younger readers.

All in all, not the worst thing I've ever read, but still fairly disappointing. Kind of like when that actor you like decides that he or she can also be a pop singer. That rarely ever works out.
